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Written Testimony for Education Committee Public Hearing March 19, 2015

HB 7019 - AN ACT CONCERNING MINIMUM BUDGET REQUIREMENT

HB 7022 - AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS AND CHANGES TO THE STATUTES CONCERNING SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS.

The Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) is a non-profit professional association that represents school business officials (SBOs) throughout the State of Connecticut. SBOs work closely with school boards, administrators, staff, public officials and communities; and are responsible for most aspects of school business and operations. This includes, but not limited to, developing and monitoring school district budgets and overseeing school facility and maintenance matters.

CASBO opposes HB7019 the following reasons:

1. The state funding of education via the ECS has been flat funded for most schools for many years. This has occurred while the cost for educating our students continues to rise due to contractual obligations; new mandates (common core curriculum, smarter balance assessments, teacher evaluations etc.); energy, transportation, and the impact of inflation on many other costs. To provide municipalities the ability to reduce needed funding for education to supplement non-education items during these times would be counter productive and negatively impact children.
2. Budgets for Boards of Education (BOEs) and municipalities have been very tight for many years and are expected to be tight for many years to come. As a result, budgets are very carefully developed and vetted by all parties. BOEs already adjust budgets for enrollment decreases, when warranted. It is important to note that enrollment decreases do not automatically reduce a school budget by a set dollar amount. For instance, an enrollment decrease of 30 students could be spread across 10 grades. This could increase class size per grade from 21 to 24 but not necessarily result in staff reductions or reductions in the number of school buses. There would be some reduction in instructional supplies but this would be much less than the current \$3000 per student amount or the proposed 50% of net current expenditures. Again, school budgets are developed and adjusted for enrollment decreases, if possible, and further reductions from this proposed bill are not warranted.
3. Many BOE's and municipal leaders enjoy very positive and collaborative relationships. This proposed bill could result in creating a divisive atmosphere among key stakeholders.
4. Changing demographics in many towns have resulted in the need for more resources even though overall enrollment is going down. Many school districts have seen an increase in the number of ELL (English Language Learners), special education and free and reduced lunch students, even though the overall student population is lower. These students require more resources, which is another reason that enrollment decreases alone cannot be the basis for adjusting MBR. A full review of all the many factors that go into the development of school budgets much be all considered in order to properly educate all the students in a school district.

For the reasons stated above, CASBO strongly urges the Education Committee to reject the proposed changes to MBR in HB 7019.

CASBO supports changes to HB 7022 that will permit a referendum to take place the next November assuming all other issues are addressed by June 30. This will provide opportunities to have a referendum tied to the general elections, if needed. It also avoids referendums in the May or June, which may not be the best time for some schools and towns to conduct such referendums. All in all, this proposed legislative change makes great sense.